



# MEDICAL SOCIETY OF VIRGINIA Issue Backgrounder

## Mental Health

### Issue Background

In response to the 2007 tragedy at Virginia Tech, there were public calls to improve Virginia's public and private mental health systems. As a result, a series of significant legislative measures and budget initiatives were passed in 2008. These proposals reflected increased awareness of and desire to improve psychiatric services for Virginians.

Two years after enactment, these reforms require increased resources including public funding, increased physician workforce, and private sector coverage. Policy changes to improve coordination of care between emergency rooms, courtrooms, jails, hospitals, and community providers are also needed.

Since 2008 MSV has coordinated the efforts of the Physicians for Mental Health Reform (PMHR) coalition. PMHR is comprised of representatives from medical specialty societies, including psychiatrists, emergency physicians, primary care physicians and pediatricians, engaged in a unified effort to advance legislation to improve Virginia's public and private mental health systems. PMHR stands ready to assist members of the General Assembly and other stakeholders in developing and supporting measures that will expand access to psychiatric care, maintain high standards of care, and protect patient privacy.

### MSV Talking Points

- » Virginia presently faces a shortage of primary care physicians who are adequately trained to deal with patients displaying symptoms of mental illness.
- » MSV supports increasing the capacity of primary care physicians to care for children with mental health disorders by seeking state funding to grow a successful pilot program so that access to pediatric mental health care in Virginia may be expanded.
- » One of MSV's chief objectives is to help ensure that health care providers have clear, straightforward guidelines to implement statutes on how to care for mentally ill patients in the middle of the night or in emergency departments.

For more information, contact the Medical Society of Virginia's government affairs department by phone at 804 | 343-1185, or visit the MSV Web site, [www.msv.org/legislative](http://www.msv.org/legislative).

